

During 1994 the governments of the Pacific Island states acknowledged, with some reservations, the need for more effective policies on environmental, resource, economic development, and population issues. They also began coming to terms with declining interest in the region by much of the wider world in general and some donor countries in particular, and accommodated themselves, with some misgivings, to a more assertive Australian stance.

The island countries were strongly represented at the United Nations-sponsored Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing Countries, held in Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April to 6 May 1994. The conference agreed on a fifteen-chapter environmental action plan, but participants were disappointed when donor countries emphasized that no additional funds would be provided to help implement the plan. Instead it would be necessary to find funds by reordering other aid-spending priorities. Some island participants criticized the industrial countries' failure to act more promptly and effectively to reduce industrial emissions, despite their impact on global warming, and complained that the agenda of the conference and associated meetings had been managed to avoid consideration of questions relating to decolonization and neo-colonialism.

The South Pacific Forum also focused on the question of sustainable development at its annual meeting,

held this time in Brisbane, Australia, 31 July to 2 August, with the theme of Managing Our Resources. With strong Australian encouragement, the Forum participants gave a sharper focus than had been the case at earlier meetings to practical policy measures and their implementation. The meeting condemned exploitative and environmentally destructive forestry and mining projects in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in Melanesia, and took steps to establish common standards and codes of conduct. The attitude of the Melanesian governments was initially encouraging. They had already considered the forestry question at the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting in Auki, Solomon Islands, in early July. But after changes of government in Papua New Guinea in September, and in Solomon Islands in November, the momentum toward reform diminished, while the ready cash offered by several of the logging companies remained attractive.

The Forum meeting also called for fairer returns for the island countries from the exploitation of their fisheries resources by fishing fleets from outside the region, and endorsed efforts to get Japan, Korea, and Taiwan to sign multilateral fisheries deals with the island countries, rather than seek to maximize their advantages by negotiating with them one by one.

The Forum also agreed, with Australian support, to pursue efforts to gain observer status as a regional organization at the United Nations, in order to better promote island country

interests. On 18 October the United Nations General Assembly decided by consensus to grant observer status to the Forum. In addition, the Forum endorsed the establishment of a South Pacific Representative Office in Tokyo, to facilitate better promotion of island country interests in that part of the world. On 15 December Palau became the 185th member of the United Nations, following its transition to a new status defined by a Compact of Free Association with the United States on 1 October. Palau will become the sixteenth member of the South Pacific Forum at the 1995 Forum meeting.

At the 1994 Forum meeting President Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands confirmed that his government was investigating the possible use of some of the islands in the Marshalls group, specifically those earlier polluted by American nuclear testing, for nuclear waste dumping. He indicated that given the strong international interest in the development of such facilities, the returns would be lucrative, providing funds to assist the Marshall Islands restore some of its contaminated islands and to help overcome its serious economic problems.

The Forum did not adopt a position on the question, but during the course of the year the neighboring Federated States of Micronesia, and several non-government organizations, expressed strong concerns. They argued that waste dumping in the Marshalls, and the shipment of waste materials there, would not only pose unacceptable health and environmental risks, but would also create a precedent for the extensive dumping of nuclear and

other toxic waste in the Pacific Islands region.

Another environmental question, concerning the greenhouse effect, arose around the time of the Forum meeting, although it was not a major item on the formal agenda. In early August, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu queried whether the apparently unprecedented tidal waves that had recently battered some of that state's atolls were attributable to rising sea levels. He criticized Australia for not doing enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and hence global warming, and asked whether, if rising sea levels threatened Tuvalu's viability, Australia would host the resettlement of the Tuvaluans.

The ongoing secessionist crisis in Bougainville was again kept off the Forum agenda, with the island governments continuing to regard it as essentially an internal matter for Papua New Guinea, despite private reservations. The issue attracted less international attention than in earlier years. Nonetheless, in early March the United Nations Human Rights Commission expressed deep concern about the large number of reported human rights violations and called on Papua New Guinea to invite a United Nations team to visit Bougainville. In May, the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, which includes bishops from Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands countries, urged Papua New Guinea to withdraw its troops from the North Solomons Province and to open peace talks with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army.

While continuing to reject a visit to Bougainville by a United Nations mission, the Papua New Guinea govern-

ment welcomed an Australian parliamentary delegation on a fact-finding mission in April. It also pursued peace negotiations with the various parties, while seeking to consolidate its political and military presence. These negotiations seemed to be bearing fruit in early October, when peace talks were arranged to take place in Arawa, the provincial capital. In a first for the region, a multilateral peacekeeping force, comprising personnel from Fiji, Vanuatu, and Tonga, and with strong financial and logistical support from Australia and New Zealand, was hastily assembled and deployed to help maintain peaceful conditions for the talks. But the leading figures in the Bougainville Republican Army refused to attend, claiming that the Papua New Guinea government was planning to kidnap and kill them. Following the talks the Papua New Guinea government continued its efforts to reestablish control over the province and to restore services. In early December Sir Julius Chan, who had replaced Paias Wingti as prime minister in September, renewed the call he had made in the early 1980s for the establishment of a permanent regional peacekeeping force, designed to assist with the resolution of internal conflicts in the island countries. But leaders from the other island countries, as on the earlier occasions, appeared reluctant to support this proposal.

Although some tensions persisted, the Bougainville conflict had fewer repercussions for Papua New Guinea–Solomon Islands relations than in previous years. In March, Papua New Guinea paid the Solomon Islands nearly US\$500,000 in compensation for deaths and damage caused by

Papua New Guinea forces during raids across the border in 1992 and 1993. During 1994 Papua New Guinea appeared to be exercising somewhat more effective control over its forces on Bougainville. Meanwhile Solomon Islands prime minister for most of the year, Francis Billy Hilly, took a more conciliatory approach than his predecessor, Solomon Mamaloni. In October however, Hilly lost the confidence of parliament, and Mamaloni returned as prime minister in early November. Observers expected that Mamaloni might at once adopt a more combative line with respect to Papua New Guinea. However, in his first weeks in office he completed arrangements with the Papua New Guinea government for the posting of a United Nations representative to Honiara to help handle refugee issues arising from the conflict.

During the year some of the island governments considered the implications of moves toward world trade liberalization. The island countries may benefit from improved market access and increased international economic activity, but the liberalization process will threaten the preferential market access they now receive, as developing countries, for their exports. Among the island countries, only Fiji is a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, having joined in November 1993, while only Papua New Guinea is a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which agreed in November 1994 to implement free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region by the year 2020. The Forum Secretariat has observer status at APEC, in order to represent island country interests, but it is not clear, assuming that the trade liberalization

process continues to gather momentum, whether these interests will be given appropriate attention.

The increased salience of economic and trade issues formed part of the changed and fluid circumstances of the post-Cold War era. Some traditional external partners, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, confirmed earlier indications that their interest in the region had sharply declined. France, for its part, maintained its presence in its three South Pacific territories and continued to consolidate relations with island governments through modest but well-targeted aid spending, and through educational and cultural exchange programs. Peaceful conditions in New Caledonia, and the continued suspension of France's nuclear testing program, provided favorable conditions for the maintenance of good relations between France and the island governments. Interest by some companies based in Southeast Asia in the resource potentials of the Melanesian countries remained strong, against a background of complaints over irresponsible and exploitative behavior by some of these companies.

Meanwhile, Australia reaffirmed its commitment to the region. The energetic Gordon Bilney, Australia's minister for Development Assistance and Pacific Islands Affairs, spearheaded a more assertive role by Australia in regional affairs and in its relations with particular island countries (see Fry 1994). He targeted the poor economic growth record of several island countries and urged the need for major structural reforms, including tightening budgets, reducing the public sector, developing the private sector, and

rationalizing regional aviation. The island governments appeared reasonably receptive to this advice. Nonetheless they had reservations about aspects of its presentation and were irritated by the "doomsday scenarios" highlighted in some press accounts. Concern was also expressed that Bilney's complaints overlooked particular problems and achievements and focused too much on the Melanesian countries and Fiji, largely overlooking the smaller countries (Fraser 1994).

Bilney also warned that it might prove difficult to maintain present levels of Australian aid, unless the island governments instituted reforms to ensure better accountability and the more effective use of aid funds. How far will island governments be able to meet Australian requirements for improved accountability and effectiveness? The jury is still out, but recent reports of maladministration and corruption in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Western Samoa, and some other island countries have not encouraged optimism (see Denoon 1994).

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